

THE BREAD-EATING JEW

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In Genesis (12:3) when G-d tells Avraham to leave his land, He makes a series of promises to him. Among those promises is the following blessing. *"And I'll bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse, **and all the families of the land will be blessed in you.**"* What is the meaning of being blessed "in someone"? Rashi explains, "this is its simple explanation, a person will say to his child 'be like Avraham'." Rashi proves this from the words in this week's parsha, "In you Yisroel (the nation) will bless (their children) saying, 'may G-d make you like Efrayim and Menashe'". These are the beautiful words which can still be heard to this day in traditional Jewish homes on Friday evenings when we bless our children. In other words, Rashi is saying that the meaning of being blessed "in someone" is that they will pray that their generations will turn out like Avraham.

OK, it sounds like a nice thing a parent would be proud of, but what is the great significance of this blessing? It actually is the foundation of Avraham's aspirations. The fulfillment of Yaakov's blessing regarding Efrayim and Menashe is the realization of Avraham's greatest and loftiest dreams.

Avraham took it upon himself to teach the world about the existence of one G-d who loathes human sacrifice, and loves kindness. Avraham was the pillar of kindness, and through his acts of kindness he educated the world about G-d. He had tens of thousands of followers. He established places of worship where his students continued to teach as he made the rounds planting seeds, building, and encouraging people to give up self-defeating idol-worship. He complained bitterly to G-d that he had no inheritor. His concern was of a spiritual inheritor. He wanted a son who would father a nation that would exemplify the elevated ideals of service of the One G-d. Avraham knew he couldn't do it alone. In Genesis (17:6) G-d makes another promise to Avraham. *"And I'll make you exceedingly fruitful, and I'll make you into nations, and kings will go out from you."* Another promise that would fulfill a mother's dreams. G-d knew what was on Avraham's mind. Kings are famous. Their influence can be international. People look to leaders to emulate them. The whole world will come to know, and serve the One G-d.

Where do we come in to all of this? Whether we like it or not, we Jews are visible. We may try to hide, but it always follows us. Wherever we are, people take note. I once heard of a small middle-American town which had one sole Jew living among them. He was totally assimilated, and even ate bread during Passover. Hence, he was referred to as the bread-eating Jew. We have a Job. We have a Torah, and commandments to learn and follow. When we follow them in earnest, we are viewed as people of conviction, people with standards. We are viewed as scholarly, and wise. People

admire us, and emulate us and our lifestyle. In contrast, without the Torah we know how far we can sink.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, of blessed memory, was a Rabbi in Russia in the earlier part of the 20th century. It happened that there was a postmaster in his town who was testing the Jews by deliberately giving them extra change for their purchases. They came to Reb Yaakov for his advice. Needless to say, all of the money which was overpaid was returned. It is a fact that this postmaster saved 92 Jews during World War II. Seeing the impeccable honesty of these simple people was enough to convince this man that these people needed to go on living and contributing what they had to offer to the world. This man is credited for saving these people's lives, and the lives of all of the generations ever to come from these people. Imagine if they had not demonstrated the degree of honesty which they had shown. May we all merit to be the kind of people whom others would wish to emulate, and bless their children that they should do so as well.

Good Shabbos!

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